

Spiritual Leadership

Ezra 8:15-36 - NCBC, June 5, 2016

Main Point: **God favors spiritual leaders who recruit workers, prepare hearts, and delegate responsibilities for God's greater glory.**

- **Spiritual leaders recruit workers (v. 15-20)**
 - Careful Double-checking
 - Conscientious Delegation
 - Clear Direction
- **Spiritual leaders prepare hearts (v. 21-23)**
 - Fasting for personal humbling
 - Fasting for God's help
 - Fasting for God's honor
- **Spiritual leaders delegate responsibilities (v. 24-34)**
 - Consecrated Service
 - Clear Accountability
 - Caring Rest
- **Spiritual leaders cause others to glorify God (v. 35-36)**
 - Cleansing Worship
 - Compelling Witness

Application: **Prepare your heart for the ministry God is calling you towards.**

Opening Announcements: (Darin)

Prayers for Phil Grogg and his family following the passing of his brother Richard in Arizona on May 15th. We apologize for an oversight in failing to announce this in a more timely manner. Please continue to pray for Phil and Lisa as they grieve the passing of Phil's brother to cancer.

Elder Prayer for Offering

<<Your Name>>



Thank you worship team. [2nd service – dismiss 3yr – K children for children's church]

The name of the Lord is a strong tower – the righteous run into it and are safe. (Prov 18:10) But when our minds are fixed on our Savior Jesus – we don't cower in a corner and hide from the world that we have been commissioned to serve. Rather, knowing that Jesus is with us – we humbly reach out with arms of compassion

and mercy. We speak up with bold humility about the rescuing grace of God so that none of our neighbors or friends can ever enter the eternal judgment of hell without having to repeatedly reject our loving invitation of God's grace to them in Christ.

Church – nothing has the power to save and rescue souls from sin but the person and work of Jesus Christ.

But many loved ones in our communities are feverishly seeking help and hope from the slum heap of this world. That's why we're constantly seeking creative ways to engage our community with the good news of Jesus.

So when the village of Mackinaw offers us an opportunity to come alongside them and serve our community in a Strawberry Shortcake tent at their upcoming Mack-A-Fest – we sit up and take notice. What a great way to show the community that the local church wants to be involved in their lives? Imagine a gaggle of joyful servants wearing New Castle T-shirts and blessing the socks off of our community with the sweetness of shortcake love?

So if you have time to help on June 15 with setup, or actually serving in the short-cake booth **June 16-18th**... please make sure to let the church office know this week. Let's shower our neighbors with love and give them a reason to ask us of the saving hope within us!



Let's now prepare to read God's Word from **Ezra 8**.

If you do not have a Bible with you today, our ushers are coming now to give you a Bible. Please catch their attention as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Let's quickly review what we've learned from our study of Ezra-Nehemiah so far.

Ezra + Nehemiah			
GOD RESTORES			
Ez. 1-6	Ez. 7-10	Neh. 1-7	Neh. 8-13
Restoring the Temple	Restoring the People	Restoring the Wall	Restoring Worship
Zerubbabel	Ezra	Nehemiah & Ezra	
Haggai & Zechariah	—	Malachi	
First Return 538 BC	Second Return 457 BC	Third Return 444 BC	

In chapter 7 we met the godly scribe Ezra. And we learned that God supernaturally works through leaders who **study, live, and teach God's gospel** – in that order. Ezra 7 also gave us insight into how God's sovereign hand of favor was blessing Ezra through King Artaxerxes to providentially authorize a second return of exiled Jews from Babylonia to Jerusalem in 457 BC.

So today, in chapter 8 of Ezra, we learn more specifically how Ezra's leadership brought about this second return of approximately 5,000 Jews back to God's promised land. And through our study this morning we learn valuable lessons about spiritual leadership.



You will find Ezra **chapter 8** on page **394** of the Bibles we've handed out. The first 14 verses provide a selected genealogy of the returning exiles. Then in verses 15-20 God's good hand provides the necessary Levites to join in the return. So let's pick up the reading now in verse 21.

Please stand in honor God's Word, as I've selected to read **Ezra 8:21-23** from the English Standard translation:

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. 22 For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." 23 So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

This is the word of our Lord. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

I'm so thankful for God's restoring grace. Just like God worked through Ezra and Nehemiah to restore His children back to a place of promised blessing, so God is graciously rebuilding our New Castle family in this season. This week God's Spirit has continued to bring some of you to saving faith and repentance. In recent months several of us have taken steps to publicly identify with Jesus' cross and resurrection in believer's baptism, and even more have publicly identified with Jesus' church in church membership. God's Spirit is moving more and more members to sacrificially get involved in ministry -- for God's sake, rather than their own -- and His Spirit is bearing fruit among us! These are all evidences of God's good hand on us -- all glory and praise belongs to God alone for how He is restoring us in His gospel love.

And now that we're almost halfway through 2016 together, it's only fitting that Ezra calls us to more deeply consider spiritual leadership. In the last year God has brought us two new pastors – raised up two new missionary families – and significantly strengthened our elders and staff in regards to the Scriptures' teaching on biblical shepherding and a God-centered ministry philosophy. So no matter if you are an elder, life-group leader, or brand new member here at New Castle – we all need to deepen our understanding of the kind of spiritual leadership that God's hand blesses.

So today in Ezra 8 we learn that



God favors spiritual leaders who recruit workers, prepare hearts, and delegate responsibilities for God's greater glory.

Three times in this chapter Ezra says "the good hand of God was on him." Verses **18, 22, and 31**. So let's quickly walk through this chapter together and make some observations about the kind of leader that God favors.

In verses 15-20 – after identifying all the heads of the families that Ezra was able to gather together to join in his return – we learn that,



Spiritual leaders recruit workers (v. 15-20)

Spiritual leaders know their limitations. The scope of our Christian mission is far greater than any one person's gifts or influence. After all, according to Ephesians 4:12 God gave the church its spiritual leaders not to do the work of the ministry, but to "equip the saints for the work of ministry."

One of the differences between a leader and a faithful servant is that a leader is influencing and recruiting others to join with them.

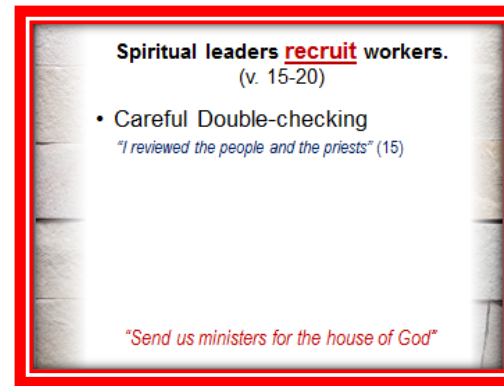
Consider Ezra's situation here. He was not asking people to join him on a Caribbean Cruise. He was recruiting God's people to leave their relative ease and comforts of life as they knew it in Babylonia, travel 900

miles of desert, only to arrive in a place that they had never seen which had none of the creature comforts they had grown accustomed to in the Persian capital.

But spiritual leaders recruit workers to God's glory – not personal comfort. Ezra successfully recruited nearly 1,500 men plus women and children to return with him by teaching the Torah – and exciting the faithful's desire for the joy that follows obedience to their great God.

By the way, is God now calling you to leave a place of comfort and ease for God's greater glory and your greater joy?

According to **Ezra 7:9**, this group left Babylonia on the first day of the first month. But notice chapter 8:15. Shortly after leaving Babylonia, Ezra the spiritual leader gathers the group of nearly 5,000 refugees by a river and they camp for 3 days. Here we observe the



Careful Double-checking of spiritual leaders.

Ezra reviewed the people and the priests... he took inventory and assessed the people that God had brought together...and that's when he noticed that none of the Levites had agreed to join his mission.

Spiritual leaders recruit the necessary workers for the ministry at hand – and for this restorative mission back to the holy land, the temple workers and Levites who assisted the priests in the grunt work of the sacrificial system were absolutely necessary.

So how does a spiritual leader respond when a ministry is lacking certain kinds of ministers?



Conscientious Delegation

In verse 16 Ezra sent 9 leaders and 2 men of learning to recruit the hesitant Levites. Ezra gave very



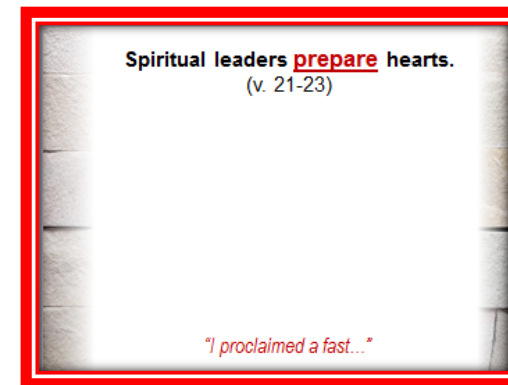
Clear Direction.

In verse 17 he told these insightful men exactly where to go, who to speak with, and even what to say. Spiritual leaders like Ezra rightly assess what is needed, prudently delegate significant tasks to others, and provide sufficient instruction to ensure successful outcomes.

And verses 18-20 gives the joyful result. By the good hand of God, Ezra's delegated recruitment efforts produced 38 Levites and 220 temple servants! A glorious response for such short notice with so little time to prepare for such a monumental move!

After another such obvious display of God's grace upon them – you would think Ezra would be excited to shove off, and begin their mission.

But God favors spiritual leaders who not only recruit workers, but also



prepare hearts (v. 21-23)

Ezra and the rest of God's refugees were not yet ready for their mission. Their hearts had to be rightly prepared first. So verse 21 says that Ezra proclaimed a fast....so that the missionaries might humble themselves before God.

Now fasting is an interesting topic for God's people these days isn't it? Fasting is most often misunderstood today

– and it's actually far easier to rightly understand fasting than it is to actually practice this necessary spiritual discipline.

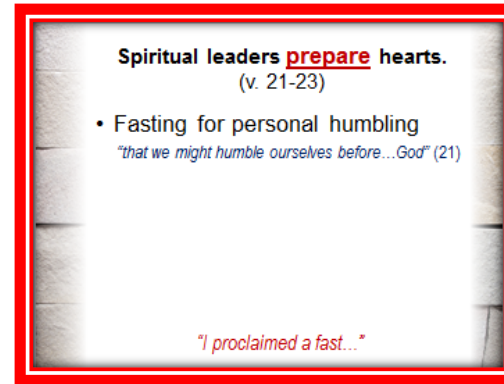
The more afflicted God's people are by earthly riches and materialistic comforts, the more necessary the discipline of fasting is for them.

Fasting is not just for monks and hyper-spiritual people. Fasting is not a high-powered bargaining chip that we use to get God to do what we want. Fasting does not impress God.

Fasting is about desperation. Fasting is about hungering for God more than anything else. Fasting is about freeing our hearts and minds from the deceitfulness of riches and purifying our souls to know God more intimately.

Look at the text. What reasons does Ezra give for proclaiming a fast?

First, in verse 21 he advocates



Fasting for personal humbling

God's grace is desperately needed anytime God's people enter into true spiritual ministry. And God only gives grace to the humble.

Here's a problem with me and with you – dear child of God. We think we are able. We think we are good enough. We are tempted to think that God's faithfulness to us in the past was somehow merited by our faithfulness to Him....and thus we trust far too much in ourselves and our own perceived righteousness.

But church – spiritual revival can only be awakened by God's people crying out in desperation for God's Spirit to do something that is far beyond any explanation of human effort or planning.

But you ask... what is a fast? And how do you do it? In brief, fasting is an intentional denying oneself of anything that can hinder our communion with God. You can fast

from food.¹ From sex with your marriage partner.² Or even from food and water both.³

I've provided some further resource recommendations on the back of your sermon notes page this morning, and they offer much practical encouragement in this area. But be clear on this – the only right motivation for fasting is to humble yourself as you pray.

All throughout Scripture, God uses the means of fasting to expose sin in His people, to break addictions and bring natural appetites under the control of God's Spirit, and to aid in our worship of Jesus Christ.

So fasting is motivated by a desire for true humility, and must be combined with intentional times of prayer and study of God's Word.

Just as the rest of verse 21 teaches us, Ezra wanted to prepare their hearts for their spiritual ministry through



Fasting for God's help

Their group of men, women, and children were facing a difficult and dangerous journey of 900 miles. And they were carrying financial treasure literally worth millions of dollars. So their fasting was only to highlight their prayers – afflicting themselves physically while they were spiritually reminding themselves they were under the protective care of God Himself.

Verse 22 provides interesting insight into the integrity of Ezra as a spiritual leader. For another reason he proclaimed a fast for the group was

¹ Luke 4:2

² 1 Corinthians 7:5

³ Ezra 10:6



for God's honor

You see, during his conversations with King Artaxerxes, Ezra had boasted about how God was more than enough. How God protects those who seek Him, but pours out powerful wrath upon any who forsake Him.

So in verse 22 we see the integrity of Ezra who desired to live consistent with what he said he believed. God's honor was at stake here – and so he called the group to fast to prepare their hearts with great dependence and faith in the All-Sufficient God of Israel.

So let me ask you this morning – where are you tempted to dishonor God's reputation by not living what you say you believe?

All of our hearts are tempted to live inconsistent duplicitous lives. That's why we need Jesus! And fasting awakens our senses to the profound depth of our hunger for Him.

God favors spiritual leaders like Ezra who recruit others to ministry, help them prepare spiritually for the mission at hand, and then



delegate responsibilities (v. 24-34)

Notice Ezra's example in verse 24. Once the hearts of the refugees had been cleansed and strengthened through a concentrated time of fasting and prayer – Ezra delegated significant responsibility for the valuable treasure to 12 priests and 12 Levites, and their families.

And notice how spiritual leaders delegate responsibility here. First in verse 28, we observe that Ezra



Consecrated their Service

Ezra was such a God-centered leader – he kept the people focused on who they were ultimately serving, and for what ultimate purpose. So leaders – when you delegate missional responsibilities to volunteers – help them connect what they are doing to their worship of God.

You are holy to the Lord, and the work you are entrusted with is holy to the Lord. There is a spiritual significance to your role among God's people that is higher than common life.

And Ezra administrated delegation with



Clear Accountability

Ezra and his band were responsible to get millions of dollars of temple treasure across 900 miles of desert in 4 months. This is a God-sized mission for sure.

But spiritual leaders care for their followers enough to protect them with clear accountability. Ezra weighed out exactly how much treasure he gave to each family, recorded it, and then let them know that they would weigh it in again upon their arrival in Jerusalem. Spiritual leaders are careful to use record-keeping and auditing to protect their members from scandal or false accusation.

And in verse 31-32 we see the results of such spiritual leadership.

The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way. We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days.

Before Ezra called his team members to an accounting for their ministry, he was careful to first extend 3 days of



Caring Rest

Rest is an important aspect of all spiritual leadership isn't it? And while spiritual leaders excel at delegating responsibilities and multiplying the work that is accomplished through the body – they also deeply value rest. For the Gospel frees us from placing our identity in our ministry, from measuring success by outcomes, and from having to earn God's acceptance through our performance. Gospel-centered leaders help their followers understand the practical implications of Christ's finished work. In Christ we have our Sabbath rest. Christian ministers can truly enjoy periodic seasons of rest amidst the never-ending demands of ministry – because of God's amazing grace towards us in Christ.

So what was the result of Ezra's spiritual leadership in this mission? Verses 35-36 help us see that God was glorified and worshipped. Because,



Spiritual leaders ultimately cause others to glorify God (v. 35-36)

Leadership by definition, is influence. So the result of a spiritual leader's influence upon others will be greater glory for God and greater eternal joy for their followers.

After they rested and then accounted for the safe delivery of the temple treasures... the returned exiles participated in,



Cleansing Worship

For those who love God, the first response before, during, and after such a mission must be worship.

Verse 35 talks about their burnt offerings and their sin offerings. Can you imagine the joy of these exiles as they worshipped at the temple that Zerubbabel had restored back in the very city of God in Jerusalem?

In our context, just think of all that God has done and is doing in our midst this year. And praise God for His mercy and grace! I'm so thankful for Pastor Somer's trademarked phrase that sincerely bubbles up nearly every time you talk with him ... "Thanks, Lord." He is a leader who helps us all glorify God as we live out a culture of thanksgiving together for all God has done, is doing, and promises yet to do among us in our communities.

Thanksgiving and praise are purifying. In many ways they are synonymous with cleansing worship. And did you catch the joyful result of verse 36 to such a thankful and worshipping people?



Compelling Witness

That's right. It is our thankful worship of God that causes the world to take notice, and even at times participate alongside God's people in their work.

In verse 36 the letter from King Artaxerxes is delivered and all the unbelieving community around the Jews in Jerusalem eagerly assisted Ezra and his comrades.

So where is God calling you to praise and thank Him in the details of your life, and in His work among your church family?

The result of spiritual leadership is a greater joy among God's people – a joy that is rooted and grounded in the greater glory of God Himself.



From Ezra 8 we've learned that God favors spiritual leaders who recruit workers, prepare hearts, and delegate responsibilities for God's greater glory.

So before we remember what makes this all possible, and celebrate the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf together, let me just invite you to



Prepare your heart for the ministry God is calling you towards.

Maybe you are being recruited right now (or are trying to recruit others...). Maybe you are seeking wisdom on how to delegate ministry responsibilities to others, or you are being given significant responsibilities presently.

Well I'm inviting you to slow down for a moment, and prepare your heart for the ministry God is calling you towards.

Is God calling you towards church membership? Or to follow Him in believer's baptism? Intentionally set yourself apart and pray.

Is God calling you to lead one of our new life groups this fall? We are praying that God will raise up more than 10 new life group leaders this summer. Are you one of them?

Maybe God is calling you to serve at VBS – to share the gospel with hundreds of children from our community? Or to serve in the strawberry shortcake tent at Mack-A-Fest and show the community that the church really does care about them?

Or maybe you have a new ministry idea that God has placed on your heart and you've been wrestling against it for a long time.

Today we've all been reminded that God favors leaders who help you prepare your heart first... so let me ask you,

How is your heart being prepared for the ministry God is calling you towards? Consider the resources I've listed

for you on the back of your handout. Learn more about God's design for fasting from Isaiah 58 and Matthew 6. Jesus didn't teach "if you fast..." but "when you fast..." Prepare your heart for the ministry God is giving you, and humbly wait upon the good hand of our God to do His supernatural work in and through you.



So as our servers to come forward and prepare to serve us with the communion elements, let's remember that Jesus is our Chief Shepherd – who laid down His life so that we might joyfully live. So this morning - repent of any known sin – turn from the worthless lies of sin – and find your joyful rest in faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

If you do not believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your sins, we would invite you to just simply observe us as we participate in this symbolic ceremony of our common-union with Christ. For there's nothing spiritual about this juice or these crackers. They just represent and remind us of Christ's blood and body.

So there's no advantage of participating together in the symbol if you aren't first participating together with us in God's amazing grace that saves, sanctifies, and helps us look forward to the coming glory of our God and Savior.

So as you receive the bread, and then the juice in a moment... **please wait until we can all partake together after everyone is served.**

Jesus first took bread and gave thanks for it. I'm going to ask _____ to give thanks at this time.

<< play brief song about the cross together as we wait for congregation to be served & >>

the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

<<eat>>

The men are now coming forward to serve us the cup, as we remember the blood that was spilled to cover our sins.

As we prepare to remember Christ's blood which covers our sins... I'm going to ask _____ to pray for us as we take the cup together.

<<Hymns played as we wait for congregation to be served>>

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

<<drink>>

Amen.

Christ has truly paid it all. We have so much to be thankful for.

Church – you are dearly loved. I pray for you – I pray that God will continue to build you up by the words of His grace. And that God's grace might truly appear to you.

Let's pray. **Closing prayer.**



<<At the Cross>>

Benediction

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
Hebrews 13:20-21